



World Toilet Summit 2019

São Paulo

*We've Kind of Already Done This Before:
Lessons from a Frightening History of
Sanitary Imperialism*

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World Toilet Day 2019 Big Squat Greetings from South Dakota, USA



Sanitary Imperialism

- ▶ the implementation of sanitary measures in foreign lands with little or no consideration of the wishes and culture of those receiving the sanitation

Report from Zuni boarding school, 1904

- ▶ “trying to educate hungry pagans, along the line of modern civilization [such as proper use of toilets], has been, and is likely to be up-hill business.[...] iliterate[sic] pagans----with so little knowledge of books and English, that their trainig[sic] was well nigh wasted.”

U.S. Sanitary Imperialism abroad

- ▶ Beginning in 1898
- ▶ Included Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Panama Canal Zone
- ▶ “Promiscuous Defecators” in the Philippines
- ▶ Physical violence in Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba

Letter to Gov. Taft from a Filipino citizen

- ▶ “The sanitary laws enacted by the Board of Health are unfortunate and absurd. The people of Manila have never hated the Americans as at present, and the anti-american sentiment has never been so deep as that provoked by the attitude of the Board of Health and its employees.”



“fetishistic praise of soap and toilets as ‘vehicles of civilization’ was based on a racist association linking the ‘whiteness’ of the colonizers with the cleanliness and purity typical of correct hygiene practice, in stark contrast to the dark skin color of natives who lived amid the filth and pollution characteristic of ‘backward’ societies.”
–Mariel Iglesias Ugsuet



IF GENERAL WOOD IS UNPOPULAR WITH CUBA, WE CAN GUESS THE

Nicolas Guillén “Far Off...”

“At any rate,
They [the Americans] were great...
Strong, honest above reproach,
The cream of the crop,
And our model:
for quick elections without debate,
for buildings with many floors,
for presidents who did their duty,
for those who smoked light
tobacco,
for those who used chewing gum,
for Whites who wouldn't mix with
Blacks,
for those who puffed curved pipes,
for energetic and infallible
functionaries,
for aborted revolution,
for a single strong tug on the chain
in the water closet.”

Contrasts and Comparisons

- ▶ Contemporary efforts not yoked to geopolitical imperialism—crucial difference
- ▶ By and large absent of physical violence
- ▶ Contemporary efforts likewise cross boundaries of nation, race, class, caste, etc.
- ▶ Most, e.g. SOIL Haiti, are aware of the implications and address them
- ▶ Some still use shame as a tool for social engineering

Shame, Shame

